



POCKET PC Expert

As useful as a Pocket PC can be, Pocket Word and Excel leave quite a lot to be desired. Steve Clack tries an alternative word processor and spreadsheet and discovers that size needn't be an obstacle to features



MS READER UPDATE

An update to Microsoft's free e-book reader application, which is bundled with all Pocket PCs, is now available. The update (2.4.1) addresses previous activation problems with Phone Edition devices and makes the software easier to use with memory storage cards.

Many Pocket PCs come with Microsoft Reader built into ROM memory, but it's still possible to update to the new version, which you can load to internal memory, flash memory or a storage card, by carefully following the instructions on Microsoft's website. It's available for free from www.microsoft.com/reader/downloads.

BETTER SKYPING

An updated version of the free Pocket PC Skype client is now available, allowing WiFi or 3G-equipped handhelds to make free voice calls to other Skype users with the popular VoIP software. Separate versions are available for devices with processor speeds above or below 312MHz, with the former offering better audio quality and reduced drop out. As well as free VoIP calls, Skype offers reduced-rate calls to landlines through a subscription service. Visit www.skype.com for more details.

NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA FOR 2006

The Pocket PC version of the Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia is now available in an updated 2006 edition, with almost 25,000 cross-referenced entries and more than 2,300 photos, maps and illustrations. Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia 2006 Handheld Edition runs inside DataViewer, a free reference software viewing application, and costs \$30 (around £17) from www.pocketdirectory.com.

CLASSIC GAME FOR POCKET PC

Adding to the growing list of classic PC games being ported to the Pocket PC, Riven is now available. Perhaps the most demanding PDA game to date, Riven requires at least Windows Mobile 2003, 16MB of free program memory and 160MB of storage card space to run, and 384MB of space during installation. It costs \$30 from www.meanhamstersoftware.com.

When it comes to running Office applications on your Pocket PC, Pocket Word and Pocket Excel can be quite a disappointment. Not only do they offer just a small fraction of the features available in their desktop counterparts, but opening and saving any desktop Word or Excel file on your Pocket PC completely discards any formatting that the handheld doesn't directly support. This includes Word styles, tables, headers and footers, Excel charts and embedded graphics. Word Mobile and Excel Mobile, which are built into the latest Windows Mobile 5.0 devices, fare a little better, with support for embedded images, tables and numbered lists in the word processor and basic charting in the spreadsheet application, but it's still a far cry from true PC desktop functionality.

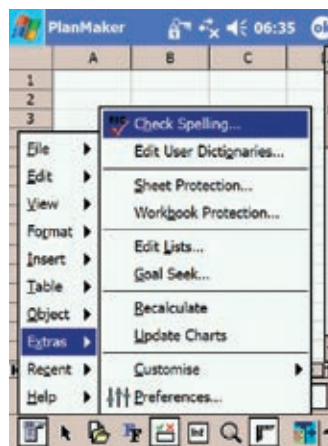
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

If you need something a little more capable for your handheld, there are alternatives to the built-in word processor and

spreadsheet applications. Amazingly, these alternatives offer almost all the features you'll find in the desktop versions of Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word. TextMaker and PlanMaker, both from German developer SoftMaker Software, are possibly the most ambitious programming projects ever undertaken for a PDA. More importantly, they keep their promise of providing the most feature-

rich word processor and spreadsheet for any handheld computer platform.

It's barely worth describing the functionality of the TextMaker word processor and PlanMaker spreadsheet application here, as it's safe to assume that almost anything you can do in Word and Excel on your desktop PC, you can do on your Pocket PC. You can take a complicated Word document that contains embedded images and tables, headers and footers, tables of contents and indices, footnotes, section breaks, pictures and forms, view it and make changes on the handheld, then save the file and export it



▲ With everything from Goal Seeking to spellchecking, PlanMaker is the last word in PDA-based spreadsheet applications

HINTS & TIPS START MENU

Customising your Start menu

You can choose exactly which programs appear in the Pocket PC Start menu, providing quick access to the applications you use most frequently. To configure this, use the Settings menu to go into the Settings screen, and choose Menus from the Personal tab. From the screen that appears, just tap the check box next to each program you want to keep in the Start menu list, up to a maximum of seven.

From the New Menu tab at the bottom of the screen, you can also choose which applications you would like to add to the New menu that appears in the bottom left of your Today screen. If you don't have this feature enabled already, check the Turn on New button menu box at the top of the New menu screen. You'll now be able to create a new file for any of the selected programs directly from the Today screen. This is quicker than creating files by opening the relevant program and accessing the New command from there. It's also a particularly convenient way of creating new Tasks, Appointments, Contacts and email messages



▲ Choose exactly which programs you'd like to appear in the Start menu using the Settings screen



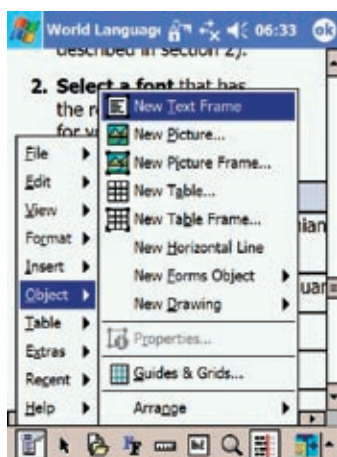
straight to your PC, intact and with all the changes in place.

Excel spreadsheets are treated similarly, right down to a full suite of graphics tools for annotating and embellishing your worksheets, as well as the full desktop gamut of charting options, filtering and outlining, Goal Seeking and so on.

PlanMaker doesn't quite have all the functions of Excel, as some advanced features such as Pivot Tables, Scenarios and worksheet auditing are absent, but at least 85 per cent of the full Excel functionality is there.

HUNGRY FOR POWER

There is a downside to having all this power in the palm of your hand, other than the fact that you'll need to shell out €40 (around £28) for TextMaker and €50 (around £34) for PlanMaker. With such a huge number of features on offer, the menu options



▲ TextMaker offers phenomenal word processing capabilities, but the menus can be a handful to navigate

simply don't fit into the usual space. All the menus are nested, and each menu item requires at least two taps to access it, sometimes three. This isn't a major problem, but it makes navigation that little bit slower, and you realise that you're working with a bit of a behemoth. It's also important to remember that Microsoft Word files on the desktop can become huge if they have a lot of embedded images and so on, and you may find these impossible to work with on your handheld. However, these are limitations of processing power and storage space rather than inherent shortcomings in TextMaker itself.

You're unlikely to be disappointed with TextMaker and PlanMaker, and if you want to carry complicated documents around with you, they're an absolute godsend. Not everyone will

need all this extra power all the time, but you can always continue to use Pocket Word and Pocket Excel alongside TextMaker and PlanMaker, reserving these more capable programs for documents where you need the additional features or desktop compatibility.

Both applications work perfectly well with the standard Microsoft Office suite, but you might like to consider the PC desktop versions of TextMaker and PlanMaker. These are similar to, but much cheaper than, their Microsoft equivalents and match the handheld versions almost feature for feature. You can buy bundled Windows and Pocket PC versions of TextMaker for €60 (around £41), or PlanMaker for €70 (around £48). For more details, visit www.softmaker.com.

CONTACT

POCKET PC EXPERT

If there is anything you would like to see covered in *Pocket PC Expert*, please contact us at the address below

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REVIEW DATA INPUT SOFTWARE

SMARTCELL TextPlus

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE \$20 (around £11)

DETAILS www.smartcell.com

The word completion facility built into every Pocket PC is certainly a timesaver when you're inputting text, but it's fairly limited. It pops up a list of suggested words as you type, but you can't add your own words, and all the spellings are in US rather than UK English.

TextPlus, which is already well established on Palm handhelds, provides an editable dictionary with English spellings, and adds any unknown words to its database as you enter them for the first time. To increase the chance of finding the word you're looking for, TextPlus keeps track of the words you use most frequently, putting them at the top of its list. You can configure how many

words appear in the suggestion dialog, and specialist technical dictionaries are available, as well as a variety of foreign languages. It also comes with a free PC-based Database Builder that enables you to create your own dictionaries on the desktop.

TextPlus handles phrases as well as individual words, which can save huge amounts of time in repetitive typing or scribbles. Frustratingly, though, you can't add new phrases on the handheld and have to use the companion PC application. The only other downside is that you have to pick a single input method to work with TextPlus (such as the built-in keyboard), and can only re-assign it to work with a different input method from the program's preferences screen. Still, it worked with all the input methods we tried, including the four built-in options, plus CalliGrapher (www.phatware.com) and the Fitaly keyboard (www.fitaly.com).

✓ Much better than the built-in word completion feature

✗ Can add custom phrases only through a desktop PC



▲ TextPlus is a big improvement on the standard Pocket PC word completion utility

REVIEW ACTION GAME

PDAMILL Anthelion 2

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE \$20 (around £11)

DETAILS www.pdamill.com

Pocket PC games are getting slicker all the time, and Anthelion 2, the latest space shoot-'em-up, is a perfect case in point. The aim is to destroy incoming enemy ships or asteroids, collecting a variety of floating



▲ Fast and furious: Anthelion looks great on VGA-resolution devices

power-up capsules as you go. It all sounds very simple, but the graphics, animations and sound are all top notch, and the game looks fabulous on hi-res VGA Pocket PC models.

With a heads-up display and multiple weapon types, Anthelion 2 feels as much like a jet fighter simulation as a space battle game, but the action is fast and furious all the way. It provides a good range of mission types to keep things interesting, three different alien races to play, 10 different ships

and a range of difficulty levels. It's all polished off with a particularly comprehensive array of online help screens and training missions to get you started without recourse to a printed instruction manual, replay of your last mission and the obligatory 15-mission campaign mode.

Best of all, there's an auto-fire mode that fires the current weapon continuously whenever there's a valid target in your sights, which lets you concentrate on steering rather than tapping the fire button endlessly.

✓ One of the best games in its class; plenty of fast action

✗ You need a VGA-resolution Pocket PC to appreciate its full visual impact